



PREPARED STATEMENT OF

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"Counting Americans Overseas: Lessons Learned From the 2004 Overseas Enumeration Test"

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Intergovernmental Relations and the Census
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Good afternoon. On behalf of the U. S. Census Bureau, I want to thank Chairman Putnam and the Subcommittee for the opportunity to share our experience and perspectives from the 2004 Overseas Enumeration Test. This test exposed many challenges, suggesting many decennial conditions cannot be replicated abroad.

The Census Bureau's goal for the 2004 Overseas Enumeration Test was to assess the feasibility of conducting decennial census operations overseas. Operations were designed to test whether we could locate Americans living in the three test countries, France, Kuwait, and Mexico, and whether Americans would participate and return the forms via Internet or by mail. These objectives may seem simple; but they are important. The success of the decennial census *stateside* depends on the Census Bureau's ability to attain these objectives with high standards of measurable quality.

In conducting the decennial census, the Census Bureau faces the task of finding every person living in America every ten years. This task is daunting, but it inspires our best hopes, our best ideas, and our best efforts. We believe that this duty is an incredible privilege — an opportunity to serve our nation in a fundamental and meaningful way. The civic ritual of the decennial census is nearly as old as this nation, and its fundamental purpose is one of the few specific government responsibilities written in the Constitution. The instructions may be limited, but the fundamental purpose is clearly established: to produce "a count of the whole number of persons in each state."¹ This mandate gives life to the promise of fair representation, and it is an affirmation of the great promise made on behalf of this nation to all generations — "We the people." Finally, the census is also a symbol of respect for every person and community in America; it is the only activity in our civic life that must reach every street, every household, and every person living in America.

¹ Section 2, clause 3 as amended by the Fourteenth Amendment.

It is easy to lose sight of the real goal of the census, as difficulties and controversies arise. The stakes are quite high. And with each generation and each succeeding census, we find ourselves again asking the same critical question, “Who counts?” Throughout our history, we have debated the inclusion of many population groups. Yet, with each census, we have proceeded with some assurance that the first census takers, Federal Marshals, had attempted to count every person living in America at that time, and that this should remain our guiding principle.

And while this is our guiding principle and our fundamental task, the Census Bureau has, at least for the last two decennials, included both military and federal civilian workers stationed abroad, as well as their dependents. We use administrative records from the Department of Defense and other agencies to get a count of Americans stationed abroad. Their numbers are included in the count for apportionment — the count that must be released by date of December 31 of the decennial year. However, their numbers are not included in the counts that are later released for redistricting and other purposes, such as the distribution of federal funds. The Census Bureau is confident about this method, and the Supreme Court has upheld the legality of this methodology on several occasions. While other attempts in the past were made to count the civilian population overseas, the Census Bureau has never included all American citizens residing overseas in the totals for either reapportionment or redistricting. In the lead up to Census 2000, however, both Congress and stakeholders expressed an interest in determining whether it would be possible to count all Americans living overseas.

The 2004 Overseas Enumeration Test was designed to determine the feasibility of conducting such an enumeration, as well as whether it was possible to get Americans to participate and to begin to estimate the potential cost of getting Americans to participate. The Census Bureau conducted this test at a cost of approximately \$7.8 million over three years. We chose to conduct this test in France, Kuwait, and Mexico because these countries are in different parts of the world, and each has a significant population of U.S. citizens in residence. Moreover, these populations are generally demographically diverse, and they are living abroad for a variety of reasons.

The data collection phase of the test began in February, when the census questionnaires became available both online and at a number of locations in the three test countries. We relied on consulates to provide locations for questionnaires. We also relied upon third party stakeholders to provide locations, as well as to publicize the test to their members and the American community at-large. The various clubs and organizations serving Americans, churches, and private companies that participated in this test not only helped us in this capacity, but have also helped us throughout the process with their advice and insight.

The Census Bureau finished data collection on July 2, 2004. Since that point, we have been engaged in data processing and tabulation, including quality assurance checks, preparatory to evaluation efforts. While we will not have formal results and evaluations until early next year, I am here today to share some of the early indications from the 2004 Overseas Test. One of the most important criteria of the decennial census is response rate. We cannot accurately calculate a response rate because we do not have accurate estimates of the numbers of Americans living in the three test countries. However, we believe the response was low by any standard.

- From France, we received approximately 3100 questionnaires.
- From Kuwait, we received approximately 300 questionnaires.
- From Mexico, we received approximately 2000 questionnaires — 35 of those were in Spanish.
- The total response was approximately 5400 questionnaires

Initial reaction and anecdotal evidence supplied by stakeholder groups indicates that many Americans living abroad in these countries either did not know about the test or understand its purpose. Others chose not to respond, citing concerns about privacy and their taxes. We printed over 600,000 questionnaires for these tests, and this number was partly based on estimates from a number of sources. In France, for instance, we have estimates that range from 29,000 to about 112,000 Americans in residence. When I was living in Paris, I was counted in the French census, and I am part of that 29,000 number. The larger numbers are estimates from the State Department and stakeholder groups.

- In Kuwait, a country where we could expect fairly accurate estimates of Americans — the numbers range from 1200 to about 10,000.
- In Mexico, the estimates go as high as one million.

What are our conclusions about these response rates?

These results suggest the Census Bureau cannot conduct a decennial census abroad, as done stateside, with any degree of measurable certainty. While the decennial census seems like a straightforward task — a simple count of every person — it is a system of complex and precise operations that must culminate in the understanding and cooperation of every household. The great difficulties of the census are in the process of reaching every street, household, and person; and the nature of this process is important to consider because counting all Americans overseas is a different task than conducting the decennial census stateside. It is, we have learned, a far more multifarious task. There are several key distinctions between the decennial census collected in America and counting abroad.

The first distinction is that the decennial census collected in the United States is mandatory and the purposes can be clearly communicated. It is much easier to compel participation stateside and persuade households to answer because we can communicate the benefits of the census data for every neighborhood and community.

The second distinction is the existence of the Master Address File and the mapping system— *known in census-speak as MAF/TIGER*. MAF/TIGER is literally the road map of the entire United States and every community. It is the road map for a successful census. It tells us where people are living and not only furnishes us with a list of households to contact, but also provides a reasonable means of organizing our workload and the non-response follow-up operations. We have no such resource — no maps or address lists — to reach Americans living abroad. Nor do we know of any practical methods to conduct non-response follow up. In short, we do not know where to look for every American living abroad.

Another related distinction is the lack of a field infrastructure to conduct non-response follow-up. In the United States, we hired over 800,000 enumerators and field staff to conduct non-response follow-up for 42 million households in 2000. To complement this field infrastructure, the Census Bureau also implements a massive public relations campaign, based not only on paid advertising, but also on partnerships and direct outreach. We would have great difficulty mounting operations of this size and scope around the world in 180 countries.

Finally, we also have reliable overall estimates of the U.S. population and its demographic composition. These are independent estimates known as Demographic Analysis and are based on administrative records, such as records of births, deaths, and emigration. These estimates enable us to evaluate the overall coverage and accuracy of the decennial census.

These distinctions are very important to the success of the decennial census. They are tools we will lack if we are instructed to collect the census overseas. We cannot enforce, require, or compel participation in other countries. The lack of a MAF/TIGER not only means we do not know how to find people, but also means we have no effective way of calculating a response-rate or conducting any sort of non-response follow-up operation as conducted in the decennial census. Nor can we conduct an adequate coverage evaluation.

In closing, the Census Bureau has determined that taking a census overseas would present unique difficulties — difficulties that cannot be resolved by the methodologies and tools the Census Bureau uses to conduct the decennial census stateside. The Census Bureau conducts the decennial census stateside with capabilities that enable the data to meet high standards of measurable quality. Such quality promotes the ability of the data to fulfill the purposes for which the decennial census is collected, including apportionment, redistricting, and the distribution of federal funds. The preliminary results of the 2004 Overseas Enumeration Test suggest that the data could not meet the same standards of measurable quality as the data the Census Bureau collects within the United States, which would call into question possible uses of the data.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity and I hope that this information is informative and will help the Congress in reaching its determination. I would be happy to answer your questions and concerns.